

**CITY OF SYDNEY**

**ART AND ARTISTS**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**Name:** Adam Norton

**Date:** 19 December 2008

**Place:** Town Hall House

**Interviewer:** Margo Beasley

**Recorder:** Marantz PMD 671

**TRANSCRIPT**

0.00 **MB:** This is an interview with Adam Norton. It's taking place in Town Hall House. The date is the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2008. The project is the Art & Artists in the City of Sydney Oral History Project being done on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Programme. My name's Margo Beasley and Glen Wallace from City Projects is also present. What's your actual title now, Glen?

**GW:** Programme Manager, Special Projects.

**MB:** Thank you.

**GW:** Brackets, Public Art Strategy.

**MB:** I would have forgotten. That's why I got you to say it on the recording.

**GW:** It's not actually City Projects.

**MB:** O.K, it's more complicated than that.

GW: City Strategy and Design Division, yes.

**MB: O.K. And so we're here to talk to you today, Adam. In a specific way we want to talk about the tank project which was part of Art & About and part of, I guess, the laneways section of Art & About. Did it have a particular - - -**

AN: Yes, 'By George'.

**MB: 'By George', what is meant the laneways, Art & About having been a project of the City of Sydney of public art with many different strands to it but a number of events took place in laneways and the shorthand for that, that was 'By George', was it?**

AN: That's right.

**MB: But anyway, Adam's project was the tanks project which attracted a lot of attention, a lot of curiosity and a lot of question marks in bubbles over people's heads, I think.**

AN: Yes, that was the intention.

**MB: Yes, yes, yes. So, we've already talked to Eric Stevenson who was one of the people responsible for the tanks and a driver, if you like, and an owner.**

AN: Yes.

**MB: I'm calling them tanks but they were actually armoured personnel vehicles, weren't they?**

AN: Yes, yes, to be accurate.

**MB: Yes, but tanks is the word that everybody used to describe - - -**

AN: Yes, tanks is the impression that they give.

2.00 **MB: Maybe you could tell us a bit about that project and what it was about.**

AN: O.K, all right. Well, it seemed like a good idea when Claire Taylor, the curator, approached me to come up with an idea. I mean, I have lots of problems with public art because they tend to just end up being kind of objects that you bump into. But, I mean, I've been working with military equipment and ideas for a while, using them in domestic kind of arenas and it just seemed very obvious to put a real tank in a real city so that the city is the sort of canvas and the tanks are the sort of art object primarily, because I mean my work does

have a political dimension and this year particularly and pretty much forever and probably continuously three quarters of the world almost continuously has the army present on the streets. And in our western democracies we're very lucky because we don't tend to have army except in times of sort of natural disaster; our army's here to sort of defend us, not to protect the government from us.

4.06 So, it just seemed an appropriate way of bringing home that idea, that other people in other parts of the world aren't entirely safe, especially considering that we're all part of 'coalitions of the willing' that seem to be prosecuting various international foreign policies on other people's streets so our tanks aren't actually here but Australian, British and American tanks are on other people's streets, frightening them. So, it just seemed relatively fair to do the same to us.

**MB: And was the idea for the tank project initially yours or did you say that Claire Taylor, the curator, suggested it?**

AN: Well, she asked me to come up with a project. She knows my work and she works with Peloton Gallery who are one of the galleries that asked to put forward proposals. So, she approached me as one of the artists that she thought might rise to the challenge - I hope I did that.

**MB: I guess philosophically art, I suppose, only exists where there is a reaction. Is that right thing to say? Would the tanks as an artwork in the laneways in inner Sydney work as an art object if you didn't actually have the reaction – is the actual artistic moment in how people respond to them?**

AN: Well, I think it must be with art. I mean, visual art obviously there always tends to be an object but, I mean, from an old fashioned point of view, I s'pose, if you're going around a gallery that the art object doesn't actually work until the sort of eye meets it.

6.12 So, I suppose there is that moment where the art begins to comprehend what it's seeing, when the eye begins to comprehend what it thinks of the object in front of it and I suppose that is art, that is the moment of it.

**MB: Did you witness the reaction to the tanks then; did you follow them around at all?**

AN: Yes, lots. I took some footage too, lots of still shots, but also some video footage and that was the best bit. I mean that was what the whole plan of the project was, the moment, the unguarded moment that a member of the public would have in the first second. In fact after, I think within a few moments, they started to rationalise various reasons why there might be tanks there but it was that first few seconds. Some people just walked past on their busy day; often

people with mobile phones walk past because I don't think you're really looking at the world when you're on your mobile. But it was great to see. You only had to be there for a few minutes and somebody would be stopped in their tracks and have to walk 'round the vehicles and sort of touch them; that was a reaction often, just to see if they were real.

**MB: Did they notice you filming them or photographing them?**

7.55 AN: Yes, but I tried to be relatively discreet I suppose, mostly. I probably looked like just another member of the public kind of photographing the tanks.

**MB: Can you generalise about people's reactions or be specific?**

AN: Well, it's hard to say. I mean, the look on people's faces was one of mild surprise and then after that people's minds started to sort of rationalise. So, from then on it went into different directions: inquisitiveness or – yes, mostly inquisitiveness. Some people thought they were a marketing device; that was a rumour that I heard. Somebody said, "Oh, yes, somebody said that they're selling something", so that's probably one thing they came up with. I mean, the tanks concerned are these armoured personnel carriers, they are about fifty years old so they did have a nostalgic kind of flavour to them. There was an Iraqi taxi driver that said a couple of years ago he was driving one for the Iraqi army, so he was fairly nonplussed; he wouldn't have been surprised at all to see them. But it was very nice to see that that one person in ten would just have to do this three hundred and sixty degree walk 'round them and kind of touch them at some point.

**MB: And did people actually seek an explanation or *could* they seek an explanation – was that possible?**

9.55 AN: Well, we had Eric Stevenson and the two other personnel from the company that provided the tanks who were there, looking after them. I mean, we gave them a small business card with some details on them: websites and things with the City of Sydney so they could look up, gain more information on the project. But we tried to discourage those people from going into discussions of their own because we really wanted people's reactions to stay with them rather than for them to sort of stop thinking about it because they've been given digestible explanation; I wanted people to sort of take away their thoughts as much as possible.

**MB: And were there any particularly unusual incidents? Eric told us about a few. I just wondered if you had some - - -**

AN: I captured one guy. I was filming - when they first arrived I was doing some filming - and there was one guy that over the course of about

an hour he just kept on appearing, reappearing and he was ethnically Chinese and he was carrying a shopping bag, so he sort of seemed to remind me of the shopping bag guy from Tiananmen Square. Every now and then he would do a few circuits of the tanks and then he'd disappear and then ten minutes later he'd come back and he'd walk around the tanks a couple more times and then disappear. And it was only looking at the footage later that he just kept on reappearing in the crowd, so he just seemed to be kind of mesmerised.

12.02 **MB:** **So, you were unaware of his repeat visits at the time?**

AN: Well, I spotted him but looking back at the footage he kept on coming back, he was there the whole time. Eric told me about some occasions that they had with partygoers on the weekend evenings. Girls on girls' nights out seemed to be the most difficult to control, according to him and they very much wanted to get inside the tanks, take photographs for their Facebook pages.

**MB:** **That's interesting.**

AN: Yes, sort of social networking sites. I s'pose you're always interested in a good photo opportunity in those circumstances; you've got to come up with something more interesting than everybody else's Friday night which are kind of going to look the same really, aren't they, mostly?

**MB:** **So, doing the video footage and the photographs is part of documenting the project but is it more than that? Like, is it actually part of the intrinsic, artistic work?**

AN: I think no, the documentation's just purely for my records, really, just professional proof really so I can show curators what I've been up to. I think the project happened to people in that first few seconds: that was everything that I meant it to be.

13.59 I mean, I'm still hearing some reports. The father of a friend of mine works in the city, repairing telephones, and he comes in to work very early and he said he was walking past Martin Place and one of the tanks appeared from one corner and drove right across the place because early in the morning I think they just took the quickest route to their new site. And I regret that I wasn't there; I'd love to have got a bit of footage of that. They moved to a plan but they moved on their own time, whenever they found a good opportunity but I should've – a more dedicated artist maybe would've been camping out, waiting for the best shots. That would have been good but I suppose there were other members of the public going to work early that also saw that and various other things. They used to move the wrong way down Pitt Street, I think, to get back to their new spot in the middle of the night, so all those things would've heightened the experience 'cause

they were sort of against the normal expectation of what happens in cities.

**MB: So, the documentation, that will never appear on a website somewhere?**

AN: No, it will, it already is. It's on my website; I put it up under a chapter heading for 'tank project'.

**MB: You've got lots of other interesting stuff on your website.**

AN: Yes.

16.00 **MB: You've done a lot of interesting and very thought provoking projects. Would you like to talk about them a bit? You don't have to go into any detail but I think the camouflage - - -**

AN: The camouflage suit experiment.

**MB: Yes.**

AN: Well, that was my last public art project before the tank project and I was invited into a group show at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery which is in Gymea. And all the artists invited had a residency; they have a residency programme. So, before the show I was there - they have a cottage - for a couple of weeks and I was going to present these camouflage suits which are all-in-one homemade, domestic camouflage suits made out of normal domestic kind of curtain and fabric and various other kinds of things, using again the principles of army camouflage, but the project itself was a response to the Cronulla riots.

**MB: Which were a major event a couple of years ago.**

AN: Which was a major event. Yes, it was an ongoing project. It was two back to back shows, the first one being a year after and this follow-up piece being two years after. So, my piece, the camouflage suits, was I think about fitting in, being an outsider. And I've been living in Sydney now eight years but I was working with the idea of camouflage being some way of kind of fitting in with your surroundings.

18.05 But with the suits that I made, I put on various suits and went to different sites: the beach at Cronulla and Gymea train station, various other venues and I'd find a little spot to hide in a bush or a bit of shadow and then I'd be filmed for about ten seconds and then I'd just get up and sort of move out of camera shot. And I think the film worked very well; I edited the twelve best or different diverse ones together and it kind of turns into a bit of a 'Where's Wally' sort of DVD.

**MB: It does. (A very popular children's book of a few years ago)**

AN: Yes. I showed it in a gallery in Sydney a bit later and I was able to watch people watching the film and get that sort of surprise when they've picked it. So, I suppose there's a little bit of overlap there with the tank project.

**MB: That surprise element, is that a continuing theme in your work?**

AN: Yes. Well, I think artists should use all tools at their disposal to engage the audience in their work. I think that's what they always have done but I think art periodically falls into a sort of certain amount of historicisation and people expect art to look like art of ages past. But I'm sure in their day those paintings were designed to be surprising and engaging when they were first painted, historical works.

20.06 And I just feel like I'm continuing that tradition.

**MB: You've been an artist for quite a long time, have you?**

AN: All my life.

**MB: All your life.**

AN: Yes.

**MB: In childhood too?**

AN: Yes, yes. No, I decided at eleven. I think that was the first time I consciously said "I'm going to be an artist".

**MB: And what attracted you to it at that age?**

AN: I could draw. I mean, it's very difficult to tell whether or not one thing leads to the other: are you interested in drawing or do you become interested because you're good at drawing? I mean everybody, all small children are encouraged to do what they're best at or at least they gain most praise from their parents. I suppose they give that thing high prestige in their psyche. So, I'd love to know whether or not you're born an artist or because you achieve early success you sort of become one - it would be too difficult for me to pick.

**MB: But drawing is certainly not a feature of the tank project.**

AN: I'm not sure, I'm not sure.

**MB: Can you tease that out a bit – how does it -?**

AN: Well, it's probably drawing a bit of a long bow but, I mean, mapping; there was a lot of mapping involved. We downloaded some shots of

the project area from Google and me and the curator we spent quite a lot of time mapping the possible movements of the tanks.

22.04 I mean, I think you could say we were kind of mapping the city with the tanks, mapping the area of the project.

**MB: And thinking about the city sort of two dimensionally, you mean, in the way that a drawing is two dimensional?**

AN: Well, thinking a bit three dimensionally but looking at a two dimensional image from above. But drawing has a similar quality to what I was just talking about with painting which is there is a kind of drawing that looks like art but drawings used to describe things and that's the kind of drawing that interests me more anyway. I mean very quickly – oh, not very quickly - but after a while most drawers can gain a facility to sort of make an object look authentic or real with lots of sort of clever shading but that's not the real use of drawing. I mean, I like all kinds of sort of pictorial representation. Like Venn diagrams - can you remember those from school?

**MB: Are they the multi circles?**

AN: Well, they're the circles that overlap and then the overlapping areas are used to represent topics that have multi purposes, multiple purpose. And graphs, I like graphs a lot. I mean, graph paper is nice; there's something about - - -

**MB: It's very ordered.**

AN: Well, I suppose so, I s'pose so. But I collect graph paper – is that a bit odd?

**MB: Probably not if you're a draughtsperson.**

AN: And I've got a big collection of different graph papers.

**MB: All different kinds you mean, different grades?**

24.01 AN: Yes, and different ages. Yes, I bought some when I was in France a couple of years ago; I bought some antique French graph paper. But they've definitely got a feel to them: I mean you almost don't have to do any drawing because they've already started good.

**MB: And I suppose historically they're a kind of a representation of how the world is perceived in some way. Is it like measuring instruments are or am I getting a bit off the track there?**

AN: Well, I mean I obviously like them just for some strange aesthetic reason. But all those different tones and colours and sizes already have a meaning: I mean, when I'm using them in a drawing you go



and choose the one that's already heading towards the direction. I mean, some graph papers look more technical than sort of scientific and others look more geometric, but maybe I like them because they make the viewer think about the content of the work rather than give them the impression they're seeing art. I mean, I think one of the greatest problems with art is that people approach it already thinking they're going to see some and so they put a different head on. So, I mean, what I enjoyed most about the tank project, for instance, was that nobody was expecting to see any art so their reactions were true.

25.52 I mean of course I did tell all my fans and friends that the project was on, so I know people went specifically to see them and I'm not sure if they gained as much from it as the people that just came across them accidentally. So, I think the trick with art is to remove people from the idea that they're going to see some art. You know, it's too worthy so they're not wearing the right sort of mindset.

**MB: It's not open, I guess, if they're anticipating art. I mean what you were actually seeking in that project was people's more or less instantaneous reactions.**

AN: Yes, exactly and I think the expectation of being educated sort of gives people a different mindset when they approach things.

**MB: Did you train formally as an artist?**

AN: Yes. I went to art college in Oxford in the UK in the mid '80s.

**MB: And so can I ask you what brought you to Australia?**

AN: I met a girl. I came here for a visit in 2001 and virtually the last day – I was staying with a friend, was introduced to my future partner.

**MB: I see. So, here you are.**

AN: Yes. I was on a bit of a trip so I went on to New Zealand and thought I'd stop by Sydney on the way back just to see that girl again.

**MB: And -?**

AN: And then I stayed three months and then decided to move.

**MB: So, can I ask if you're still together?**

AN: Yes, yes, we are, we are.

28.01 **MB: Right. Only because it'd be interesting to know if you stayed for other reasons as well, you know, in the long run. I didn't ask you when you were born but I probably should have in the beginning - if you don't mind telling me what year you were born.**

AN: 1964.

**MB: So, that makes you forty four.**

AN: Forty four, yes.

**MB: So you've been practising as an artist for quite a long time.**

AN: Yes, yes.

**MB: And can I ask just how you actually survive financially? I imagine your work is not something that actually gets sold particularly often; you might get funding and so on.**

AN: Yes.

**MB: Am I right in thinking that?**

AN: Well, I mean how artists survive I just don't really understand. I mean, there's certainly no money in it. I mean, it's very nice to win a good commission like this because it was well-funded but that's definitely not the norm. I mean, in my early days before I had any kind of success you're all completely self-funding. Most artists have three jobs: they have the day job that pays the bills, then they're meant to be some kind of marketing person to market themselves and do all the sort of paperwork that's required and then of course they have to find time thirdly to go away and actually do some art.

**MB: Has that been the case for you, have you had to have a day job as well?**

29.47 AN: In the past. I mean, I'm still employed by the MCA as a preparator, an art mover, but the last few years I've been fairly busy and I've now been showing in a commercial gallery, so with a few sales and a commission this year for the tank project and the residency last year just about have kept me going.

**MB: And that's the Peloton Gallery, is it – is that the one you're talking about?**

AN: No, no. I show at a gallery, Gallery 9 in Darlinghurst, which is a commercial gallery. Peloton's an artist-run space. I mean, the situation in Sydney is there are certain commercial galleries that you show in and I suppose they're primarily for money but all the artist-run initiatives can give you opportunities to do other things maybe less commercial in nature.

**MB: And a space to display them and so on?**

AN: Yes, and also give you more options to display because commercial galleries tend to be quite rigid in how many times they can show your work.

**MB: And do you have a studio somewhere - you must have, would you?**

AN: I've got a studio in Redfern which is a shared space; there's about fifteen people. I'm looking to expand at the moment. I've got about fifteen square metres and I need more, which is a good sign, I suppose.

**MB: Does it mean that you've got more work to do or the scale is increasing?**

31.50 AN: Well, I've already got a permanent art storage. I mean, as you get more opportunities to show you kind of accumulate more stuff and every time you show twenty paintings you might not sell everything so you start to begin to sort of accumulate a back catalogue of stuff which you're hoping that one day there'll be some kind of a run on it and it'll be worth keeping.

**MB: Well, good luck with that one.**

AN: Cheers.

**MB: So Glen, perhaps we should talk a bit about how Adam came to be in Art and About this year. What was the process of selection there and how does that all happen? It's pretty complex organising thing, isn't it?**

GW: It was.

**MB: It's a long lead-up time.**

GW: A long lead-up time. O.K, well the year before in Art and About there was another laneways project but it was run by a different part of the organisation. Then the Lord Mayor established her Public Art Advisory Panel and they took an interest in art and all things art in the city and made the comment about the former laneways project and then suggested an alternative for this year's project which was to engage some of the artist-run spaces in the city. And so that's what we did: we put out an invitation to twelve of the artist-run spaces in the city – and I think that was all of them at the time – and we got responses from ten of them but that meant we actually got twenty one different submissions. And then we had a subcommittee of the Public Art Panel who came in and we spent an afternoon assessing the twenty one proposals and selected, I think it was six.

34.02 And that six were given another fee to develop their concepts. So, Adam was one of the six initially and along with the others had to come back for a second round of submissions. So, the initial concept was presented – is that right?

AN: Yes, yes.

GW: Yes, I'm getting that right, yes.

AN: There was a written proposal.

GW: There was a written proposal initially and some images, yes.

AN: And then we had another written proposal and an interview.

GW: That's right, yes, that's right.

**MB: And so a smaller number were selected from that?**

GW: So, we ended up we had four in the end, yes.

**MB: So, it's a fairly grueling process?**

AN: Sure, yes.

**MB: And what was it that was attractive about Adam's work to the committee and yourself?**

GW: Adam's, yes. Well, I should let you know who was on the committee actually. There were important people like Leon Paroissien was a former director of the MCA, and I think there was Felicity Fenner who's a curator at Ivan Dougherty [Gallery], Brian Parkes from Object Gallery. So those three along with Eva Rodriguez Riestra, so our Public Art Officer and myself. So, there was five of us.

AN: And Anne Loxley.

GW: Anne Loxley, and Anne Loxley was on the panel as well, that's right.

**MB: And who is she?**

GW: Anne Loxley's a curator at Penrith Regional Gallery & Lewers Bequest. So, we had to go through the twenty one and eliminating was quite a process actually because they all had merits, you know, and all took on the challenge of the laneways and artwork in the laneways in many different ways. And some things got eliminated because they seemed to – or more gallery based and didn't really take on the aspect of dealing with the laneways and the laneway spaces.

36.02 So, that was a criteria that kept on popping up again and again. And I think Adam's was very strong because it's a very strong presence in the laneways and the idea of these objects moving around the laneways was also very appealing. And I think the initial proposal had a certain length of time and I think we actually went back to Adam and said, "Can you stretch it out for a few more days?"

AN: Yes, yes.

GW: And it was about having the right amount of presence in the city for the event because the event's over three weeks and so I think we ended up having the tanks in the city for fourteen days, was it, or close to fourteen days.

AN: Yes, yes. It was just a question of stretching the budget, really, isn't it?

GW: Yes, yes, that's right, so.

AN: Just the cost of it. I mean, three men twenty four hours and three tanks.

**MB: That's not cheap.**

AN: No, no.

**MB: They're a business, aren't they, not just - - -**

AN: Well, they are a business, and I mean just they looked into – like, a private security company would've charged us fourteen thousand just for the security alone, so it was very useful getting them who were prepared to look after their own vehicles and sleep in them. So, double up on the kind of guarding and manoeuvring we were very fortuitous, I think, to find them.

**MB: I'm guessing here but I imagine that most of the money you got for the commission went into paying the people who were - - -**

AN: Yes, precisely, yes.

**MB: Yes. So, you wouldn't have made much in income from it?**

AN: I paid myself a fairly good fee, I think.

**MB: That's good, since you're the artist.**

37.53 AN: Yes, yes. So, I mean over the years I started with very egalitarian principles but as you get older, you know, you actually have to sustain your practice and whereas before you can kind of dance around, giving it all away for free, you know, as your commitments start mounting you need to get paid.

**MB: Obviously. You have to eat and have a roof over your head and all the rest of it.**

AN: Well, yes, and just the studio, running the studio and storage, it all mounts up.

GW: I think it was reflected in some of the other projects as well. So, I think we made the point that the artist should give himself a fee but some of the other groups worked very collaboratively and involved a lot of other people.

AN: Yes.

GW: So they ended up using all their budget on materials and this and that and didn't give themselves the same amount of fee. So, we didn't prescribe the fee, you know.

**MB: No.**

AN: Yes.

GW: Some, yes, were overambitious, some budgets got stretched, and not on the artist's fees.

**MB: Yes. Anyway, it's part of the whole complicated mechanisms of the art.**

AN: I think it's very nice to get a fee, you feel much more respected.

**MB: Valued, yes.**

AN: I mean, a lot of people make money out of art and it's very seldom the artists. And it's a huge industry and the people right down at the bottom of it are the people that supply the work.

**MB: And make the least quite often.**

AN: And make the least. It's very strange. I mean, every other profession is run by senior members of its own profession except for art which is run by everybody else.

**MB: Maybe we should just talk a little bit about – I think we're probably drawing to a close but a little bit about the function of public art. Maybe you, Glen.**

40.01 AN: O.K.

**MB: Well, number one, is there a difference between public art and private art. What's private art? Is it something that hangs on a**

**gallery wall or is it owned and viewed just by a small group of people like a household, as opposed to something that's out there for any random person to see – is that what public art is, on display for anybody to see?**

AN: Well, it was noticeable with – I mean, I'm also a painter and when you have a painting on the wall and somebody views it or appreciates it I'd say that's generally a very personal experience – well, fairly obviously – but with the camouflage suit experiment even inside a gallery watching the DVD was often two or three people would be in front of it at any one time and they were kind of sharing the experience. So, I suppose public art is more to do with the shared experience than the person but I'm sure there's many other interpretations.

GW: I think it has very democratic roots, you know, in statues and fountains and all those sort of traditional forms of public art that the public could experience, the heights of culture out there in the public domain.

AN: Yes.

GW: And I think that hasn't changed too much; the artwork, the art form might have changed but the notion of getting out art in the public arena is bringing culture to the streets of the city and for the public to enjoy that.

AN: Yes, no, I'd agree but I'd probably add that in the earlier days there was much more propaganda connected to it.

GW: And that raises the issue of contemporary public art.

41.58 AN: There probably is a propaganda side.

GW: Yes.

AN: I mean, just in the nicest possible way.

GW: Yes. I think public art these days had a lot of utilitarian use for – well, we prescribe it for developers in major developments, that they should put a piece of public art and developers are often willing to do that because they see it bringing a bit more, you know - - -

**MB: It's a bit more prestige.**

GW: - - - prestige to the development, that's right.

AN: Yes, yes.

GW: You know, so there's a double-edged sort of reason for using public art.

**MB: And I guess the public art that we're talking about in Art and About is not permanent - - -**

GW: No.

**MB: - - - whereas a lot of public art is more or less permanent - - -**

GW: That's true, yes.

**MB: - - - unless a bomb blows it up or something.**

AN: Yes.

**MB: But this is very ephemeral, isn't it?**

GW: Yes.

AN: Yes. And there was some very good aspects about the project. I think the lack of permanency is one of the best things because otherwise public art tends just to be this lump that stays there forever, good or bad; once the money's been spent it's difficult to remove.

GW: So, the temporariness allows it to be more about the idea.

AN: Well, yes, and I mean presumably if you repeat the project next year, there's another opportunity and then, you know, a continual opportunity. So, if projects like that progress every generation will be able to have their own go at it, whereas we're often surrounded by the kind of public art of previous eras, even when it's kind of lost all its value and its original intent.

GW: I think you have moments of more or less public art, actually. I mean, even in recent history the Public Art Panel is an example of the city's renewed focus on public art and that hasn't happened since the Olympics.

44.05 AN: Yes.

**MB: In the year 2000.**

GW: And there's an instance of, yes, the use of public art, you know, being to encourage tourism and improving the quality of the city, to attract people. But yes, that's right, that's ten years ago now when a lot of those works were commissioned.

AN: Yes.



GW: And even before that you'd be hard-pressed to sort of put your finger on the last major programme of public art. It's sort of been quite ad hoc and often associated with development.

AN: Yes.

**MB: Are you working on any other public art projects at the moment?**

AN: No, no. I'm trying to concentrate on some painting. I wouldn't say it's my primary goal so much as my original kind of interest in art, so I sort of feel that the last eighteen months or so I haven't spent as much time on it as I'd like. So, I just promised myself to spend next year painting.

**MB: Will you be using any graph paper in that?**

AN: Yes. Well, I'll definitely use the same intention. I mean, probably not in the large canvasses but preparatory drawings and stuff. I mean, I've already got some drawings that are on graph paper that I'll be using to inform the paintings.

**MB: We probably should mention before we close also that you're at the centre of a controversy.**

AN: Oh, yes.

**MB: We don't have to talk about it in detail but it's the Warrnambool Art Gallery.**

AN: Art Prize, yes.

**MB: Art Prize, beg your pardon.**

AN: Yes. No, no, you're right, it is Warrnambool Gallery but - - -

**MB: They run the prize.**

AN: - - - they run the prize, yes.

**MB: And your work was selected as the winner but then - - -**

46.05 AN: With the camouflage suit experiment was selected by the appointed judge but according to the judge – I mean, none of it's secret because she's made a statement, she's a curator at the MCA – and she chose me, and the gallery director and the curator all agreed on her decision. And then the following day, according to her the trustee who was putting up the money came in and said, "Oh, I don't want that to win" and then threatened the gallery director to withdraw the funding for the prize if he didn't change. And then the invited judge refused to

change so the only thing they could come up with is agreeing not to award a prize. So, it's all a bit strange.

**MB: Has anything happened subsequently – there hasn't been any resolution?**

AN: Well, no. I mean, they gallery just direct me towards the council, the Warrnambool Council in correspondence and refuse to go into any kind of negotiation. So, unless I actually am prepared to take them to court I don't think there's very much I can do.

**MB: Oh well, it may have given you a brief moment of fame that might help your other works perhaps.**

47.47 AN: Well, maybe. That's all I can hope for. No, I mean prizes, artists don't necessarily agree with prizes but they're one way of distributing money and it's very galling to actually nearly win one - I wish I didn't know.

**MB: Yes, to win one and have it taken away.**

AN: Well, exactly, to get so close. I mean, to actually be – I mean, obviously you'd like to think your work's good and that you might be there or thereabouts on a prize or two, but to actually make it across the line to be the one that that particular judge really likes over the half dozen sort of good ones, I mean I don't think that happens very often. So, I mean, I might've used up my chance for another ten years or ever even.

**MB: Well, let's hope not.**

AN: Yes, same here.

**MB: O.K. Thanks a lot to both of you.**

**Interview ends**